

Florin Japanese-American Citizens League
Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

FRANCES CUMPSTON

February 15, 1991
Elk Grove, California

By Marion Kanemoto

Florin Japanese American Citizens League
and Oral History Program
California State University, Sacramento
Sacramento, California



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JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

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PREFACE

In the summer of 1987, a small group of people from the Florin JACL met at Mary and Al Tsukamoto's home to plan a new project for the organization. Because of the unique history of Florin, we felt that there were special stories that needed to be preserved. The town of Florin, California was once a thriving farming community with a large Japanese American population. The World War II internment of persons of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast, devastated the town and it never recovered. Today there is no town of Florin; it has been merged into the larger county of Sacramento. Many Japanese Americans who reside throughout the United States, however, have their origins from Florin, or have relatives and friends who once had ties to this community. The town may no longer exist, but the spirit of the community continues to survive in people's hearts and memories.

Several hours have been devoted to interviewing former Florin residents. The focus of the interviews was on the forced internment and life in the relocation camps, but our questions touched on other issues. We asked about their immigration to the United States from Japan, pre-war experiences, resettlement after the war and personal philosophies. We also wanted to record the stories of the people left behind. They were friends and neighbors who watched in anguish as the trains transported the community away.

We have conducted these interviews with feelings of urgency. If we are to come away with lessons from this historic tragedy, we must listen to and become acquainted with the people who were there. Many of these historians are in their 70's, 80's and 90's. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and to answer our questions with openness and thoughtfulness.

We owe special thanks to James F. Carlson, former Assistant Dean of American River College and to Jackie Reinier, former Director of the Oral History Program at California State University in Sacramento. Without their enthusiasm, encouragement and expertise, we never could have produced this collection of oral histories. We also wish to acknowledge the project members, volunteers, the Florin JACL which contributed financial support, Sumitomo Bank for their corporate donation, and the Taisho Young Mens Association which contributed some of their assets as they dissolved their corporation on December 31, 1991.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer

Marion Kanemoto, a retired school nurse and a member of the Florin Japanese American Citizens League.

Also present were Percy and Aileen Nakashima. Percy was a long time family friend since the 1920's.

Interview Time and Place

February 15, 1991.

Home of Frances Cumpston in Elk Grove, California.

Transcribing and editing

Joanne Iritani, a new Florin JACL member and retired school teacher from Bakersfield, completed the initial manuscript on June 12, 1993. This manuscript was forwarded to Frances Cumpston for her review and with minor corrections, the manuscript was returned on July 9, 1993.

Photography

Pictures were reproduced by Dan Inouye.

Tapes and Interview Records

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by Florin Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California, 95819. The draft transcript edited by Frances Cumpston is also located in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Frances Nelson Cumpston was born on July 28, 1913, in Elk Grove, California. She is a fourth generation of Irish descent. She attended Elk Grove schools and Western Business College in Sacramento, and worked as a bookkeeper for General Motors, Batey Brothers in Elk Grove.

She married Bill Cumpston, her high school sweetheart. Bill was a well driller. He was gone for four years during World War II serving with the 301st Ordnance Unit.

Bill and Frances befriended several Japanese Americans from their school days. Frances did an unpopular thing during World War II by going to the Elk Grove train depot to bid the Japanese Americans goodbye when they were evacuated to the relocation centers in the spring of 1942. She took pictures from this event and these have been added to our collection. She felt the Japanese should go to camp for their protection for there were hangings in the Elk Grove area.

Frances and Bill adopted one child, Sonny, and had a daughter Gail, born in 1947. Frances is a friendly energetic "little lady". She has enjoyed good health and looks much younger than her 77 years. Her recall of Japanese names is very quick. She said she was very candid, and she was. She takes pride in the Cumpston-Baker names.

Hers is the oldest name on the cradle roll at her Methodist Church. Bill passed away in 1989, and she is just beginning to adjust to life without Bill.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KANEMOTO: This is the oral history of Frances Cumpston at 8370 Elk Grove Boulevard. She was born on July 28, 1913 in Elk Grove, California. Therefore, she is seventy seven years old now. We are in her home where she has resided for fifty four years. Today's date is Feb. 15, 1991. The interviewer is Marion Kanemoto. Also in attendance are Percy and Aileen Nakashima. Percy has known Mr. Cumpston since 1920.

Okay. Mrs. Cumpston, we'd like to go as far back as we can, from even the time that you were born because I think this is the thing that made you what you are today. So, Frances can you. . . . Do you mind my calling you Frances?

CUMPSTON: No.

KANEMOTO: Okay. So could you begin from the time that you were born? What generation you are.

CUMPSTON: I was born on the corner of Kent and Elk Grove Boulevard.

KANEMOTO: Kent? K-e-n-t. Okay.

CUMPSTON: Yes. To Thomas Nelson and Vina Casey Nelson, and we lived there a year, and my grandfather, who had built the store in Sheldon, wanted to leave and retire. And so my mother and father, and aunt and uncle bought the building from him. My aunt and uncle soon left, and my mother and my father continued there until my father died two weeks before my fourth birthday. So my mother, with a seventh grade education, became a businesswoman and was the cornerstone of my life. She was a very shy lady, very quiet, which I'm not. And she taught me at a very early age, very deep respect for customers that came into our store. And there I learned that they were not only customers, but they were my friends. And that has continued through the years. I still keep in touch with a lot of them, people that I knew then that are still alive.

KANEMOTO: Can you tell us a little bit about your husband, Bill?

CUMPSTON: Bill was born in Wisconsin. And at the age of one they moved to Elk Grove over on Bruceville Road. There were quite a few of the people that had come out of Wisconsin at that time, and they had a regular little community of their own. So, they soon became fast friends. Bill has left me with some of his friends from there. They were also raised by very religious people, and they stayed with the church, and had a great...

KANEMOTO: What denomination was this?

CUMPSTON: Methodist.

KANEMOTO: Methodist.

CUMPSTON: And they had a very deep regard for other people. And so Bill learned his lesson, as I learned one from my mother.

KANEMOTO: Okay. So as far as your education, it was entirely within Elk Grove?

CUMPSTON: Bill's was within Elk Grove. And then he went to work, at quite an early age. We were engaged in high school. I think parents yell at the kids today when they do that, but then, I did it so it turned out very well.

(Laughter) I went to school in Sheldon and

Elk Grove, and then I attended Western Business College in Sacramento.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. Even in those days, they had the Business College.

CUMPSTON: Oh that was in the thirties, that was in '34, '35.

KANEMOTO: That was quite a commute wasn't it? You really had to be determined.

CUMPSTON: But my mother had the store, so I used that time to pick up the fresh groceries, you see. After my school, I did the running. I'd been driving since I was fourteen, because my mother was a widow. I did all of this, the banking and all from the age of fourteen.

KANEMOTO: So, for banking you had to go into Sacramento?

CUMPSTON: No. Elk Grove. Oh, yes.

KANEMOTO: About education, from listening to other stories, I've heard that the Japanese had their own school. Now did you hear anything about this?

CUMPSTON: Oh, yes. That was on the corner of Bradshaw and Elk Grove Boulevard. Now the property is still there. The house disappeared some years ago, the big building. But the children

would be integrated into the regular schools,
and then Saturdays and Sundays, I guess. . .

P NAKASHIMA: Saturdays.

CUMPSTON: Was it just Saturdays? They would attend
the Japanese school, and learn their own
language and their own customs.

KANEMOTO: No. What I'm referring to is the American
school. In Florin, I understand that many
of the Japanese American students, children
were segregated. Were you aware of that?

CUMPSTON: Yes, because I talked to Dick Ledwith, an
old friend of mine, in Sacramento the other
day. He's sorry he couldn't be here today.
I wanted him to come. But he kept track of
the, especially Tom and Nellie Tanabe. They
first lived in Florin, and they moved to Elk
Grove, because of this integration in Florin.
And they stayed here and went to school and
I guess they also attended the Japanese school,
probably.

KANEMOTO: So, in Elk Grove proper, the Japanese American
students didn't have to segregate?

CUMPSTON: Just about a half mile out for the Japanese
school. But, the rest, all the other schools
were integrated. There was no problem.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. So that was at Florin, is that right, Percy?

P NAKASHIMA: Just at Florin.

KANEMOTO: Just at Florin where they had segregated schools.

CUMPSTON: And Sheldon was integrated. When they moved there, there was never, I can never, ever remember anybody...Filipinos, now that was different. They were very bitter about the Filipinos when they came in. And there were some people who didn't want the Japanese in. There's always someone that doesn't remember they came from another country themselves.

P NAKASHIMA: (Laughter) That's right.

CUMPSTON: My grandmother came out of Ireland, just her two brothers and two sisters. And I'm finding their history now. We're all from another country, that's why ...

KANEMOTO: So that you're a third generation then, is that right?

CUMPSTON: I am a fourth generation.

KANEMOTO: Fourth generation. Okay. Your grandmother, so her mother was here. So your great grandmother came.

CUMPSTON: I'm fourth generation to my great, great grandfather who came around from New York state around the Cape of Good Hope, and brought the first thrashing machine into California. Now George, and my grandfather's mother, all the children, everyone came on that ship. And she died soon after they were here. He remarried and had another four children. And even those children stayed close to us. So I'm fortunate.

KANEMOTO: I see. Okay. So occupation-wise you had this. . . . Is it a grocery store?

CUMPSTON: It used to be a grocery store. And that was the first post office in Sheldon, before it was in Elk Grove. I finally found a stamp for a man named Judge Mix. You remember Judge Mix.

P NAKASHIMA: Judge. Yes.

CUMPSTON: He was a collector of stamps with the name of the post office city, and he had everything except Sheldon. And one day, one of my cousins brought a large box of some of the dishes up there, and in it were post cards with mail box Sheldon. So he finished his set before he died.

KANEMOTO: So, how do you see the Japanese Americans, or the Japanese? Were they good customers? Did they give you good credit? I mean, owed you a lot?

CUMPSTON: No, they didn't owe us a lot. They lived within their means. I don't know who I talked to just recently. But, some of the Japanese said that they liked my mother, because when they came in after the few things they could afford, she would give the children a piece of candy. And I never knew that. Was it you?

P NAKASHIMA: (Laughter) Yes.

KANEMOTO: Your mother gave candy to Percy. You remember that Percy? That was a treat, right.

CUMPSTON: I never knew that. I knew at Christmastime she gave a lot of candy away. In fact, I had forgotten about this. Nail-keg size ice cream kegs that had these beautiful colors...what are they? They're like chocolate creams and they're in colors, and there's a name for them. And she would get that, and that all was for Christmas. That she gave away to the children and to the adults for Christmas.

And I had forgotten about it until I went back east and got into some of the Revolutionary War stores. And we walked in, Bill and I, and Bill said, "I think I'll go look at the plows, and you go look at the dresses and things." And as I walked into this room, here was this keg of the candy. And I cried, and Bill came back and said, "What's the matter with you?" And I said, "I'd forgotten all about this." (Laughter)

KANEMOTO: In those days, there weren't too many stores, were there? You didn't have a competitor.

CUMPSTON: No. The nearest one was at Sloughhouse and Elk Grove. Wilton. The little town of Wilton.

P NAKASHIMA: Wilton had a small, very small store.

CUMPSTON: My aunt married into that family. She was a Dillard. And her father was Napoleon Bonaparte Dillard. Married to Sarah.

P NAKASHIMA: That road is named after them. Dillard.

CUMPSTON: Yes.

KANEMOTO: So your store was a place where a lot of the community exchanges were. . .

CUMPSTON: There was a large, old-fashioned, big stove, in the corner of our store. And my mother opened at 7:00 in the morning, and she closed

at 7:00 at night, or 9:00 at night. And the men, when they didn't have anything to do would come in and sit and talk around that fire. And I can remember many times, somebody would have to pick me up and carry me into the backroom into bed, 'cuz I wanted to listen more. And there was a seltzer bottle that I used to get squirted with. Children weren't allowed even near the door, and I'd go out to see what they were doing at the side of the saloon. Fred Buell was a nice old fella, and he was bartender and clerk.

KANEMOTO: Big seltzer bottles, that you'd buy in antique stores?

CUMPSTON: He had one of those, and he could hit me right through the screen door. (Laughter)

KANEMOTO: So, I heard that. . . . You mentioned that you were married quite young, but. . .

CUMPSTON: I was twenty one. I was engaged at eighteen.

KANEMOTO: Okay, you were engaged at eighteen. So, now what qualities did you see in Bill, because I've heard some wonderful things about Bill. It's not only you, but also Bill, who has wonderful characteristics.

CUMPSTON: Well, he was a wonderful man. As a young man, he was just like other boys. He did things that he shouldn't have done. Like, I say his mother would write letters quite often to the Bee. But he was a quiet man, and you had to be pretty close to know he'd done something. You'd know him pretty well. But he was very quiet wasn't he, Percy.

P NAKASHIMA: He never had a great gab.

CUMPSTON: When the cops would have a drink when Bill was working down here, I've known him to put on their cap and coat and take their route down the road, while they sat and had a drink, and Bill would come back, and take them home. Ooh. Maybe I shouldn't have said that.

KANEMOTO: That's history now.

CUMPSTON: Can't lock him up now. But he went to work when he was fourteen. After fourteen, he earned all of his own money and his way. Just like I was. I don't know. I went with another boy for a year and never even kissed him. He'd say, you know, "Can I kiss you goodnight?" And I'd say, "No." But Bill never asked. He just stopped one night, and

drove up into a driveway, and pulled me over and that was it. And I knew I liked him.

KANEMOTO: Okay. You went for what he wanted.

CUMPSTON: He was quiet, but he was a very fair man. A very fair man. I was very proud of him.

P NAKASHIMA: He didn't know what prejudice was.

KANEMOTO: He didn't know what prejudice was. I see. Well, that's what I had heard.

CUMPSTON: The only time he ever showed any prejudice was in World War II, and they had a negro group by them, and they didn't want to be there in the first place. And they were really hard to be around. And they were quite rough and demanded a lot of everybody. And he came home and he never talked about it much except that he wouldn't have much to do with them. However, here, when they'd come here and need help, he was always there to help and treated them just like he would anybody else. Deep down, he just, he kept it there. He never showed it, he kept it there.

KANEMOTO: Okay, so now that we've touched a little bit about the World War II, let's see, how old were you? You were married by then? It was 1941, so you were married in what year?

You were about 34, so you were certainly on your way to having your own family.

CUMPSTON: I didn't have children. I adopted Sonny, and the following year I had my daughter. I'm one of those that needed an example. There were four of us. We all adopted, and the following year we all had babies.

KANEMOTO: Shows how beautiful a person you are.

A NAKASHIMA: She is. This fella here. (Pointing to a picture.) Same thing. She's taken care of him.

CUMPSTON: He's moved on. This young boy is my grandson. And that's Sonny's boy.

KANEMOTO: Beautiful. Okay, so when Pearl Harbor came in December of '41, what was your impression?

CUMPSTON: Oh, of course, we were horrified. Everybody was horrified. But Bill was cutting the lawn, and it came over and he said, "What's it all here?" And I said, "I don't know." And we kept on. And so that when he did volunteer, he volunteered with a group of the mechanical people in the 301st Ordnance Unit. And from here they went to North Africa, and he served there for almost a year, and then he went

into France and served the rest of the time.

He was gone four years.

KANEMOTO: Well, this was the time, a few months later, of course, the Japanese were all told, that they'd all have to leave their homes there, leave and be put into camps. This is the time I understand that you showed some very exemplary...

CUMPSTON: Now you might have these. I didn't know I still have some left. Mary Tsukamoto has the rest of them in her book. (Looking at old pictures.)

KANEMOTO: These are pictures of. . . . We were not allowed to take pictures.

CUMPSTON: They were signing. . . . The day that they left. This was the signing up. And then across, this was at the store where I worked. Brian Miles was my boss, and he gave me the day.

KANEMOTO: Now this was where?

CUMPSTON: In Elk Grove.

KANEMOTO: In Elk Grove. Not near your store.

CUMPSTON: Not Sheldon. All of this was here in Elk Grove. And this was across from the depot. And as they came and brought their bundles

and things, he let me go and I've been trying to get ahold of Carol Riley. Her mother took pictures that day. But Mary said so far, I'm the only one who has pictures of that.

(Pictures "sending off" the Japanese to camp.)

KANEMOTO: Now we see some pictures when the Japanese were gathered.

CUMPSTON: They had to go upstairs. It used to be a dance hall up there, and they opened that up. And everybody had to. . . They left their bundles over at the depot. And then the other pictures Mary has shows them loading into the train.

P NAKASHIMA: Who took those? Brian?

CUMPSTON: I did.

KANEMOTO: You see we were not able to take cameras with us so we had to. . .

CUMPSTON: No, I know you weren't.

KANEMOTO: So this is why these will be. . .

CUMPSTON: And if I still get ahold of Carol, I will see that Aileen gets them when she comes.

KANEMOTO: Yes. We'd appreciate that. That would certainly be an addition to our collection.

Okay. Percy, was this the time the Cumpstons helped you put away things?

P NAKASHIMA: No. Carlisle is where...

KANEMOTO: Okay. I'm sure you knew several other Japanese Americans or Japanese families.

CUMPSTON: Oh, in Sheldon, there were the Matsumotos, Bob Matsumoto, in Sacramento now, was one of the boys.

P NAKASHIMA: George Yamamoto lived there.

CUMPSTON: Yes. And Yamadas, Jack Nakashima.

P NAKASHIMA: The one that has lots of kids. Yamadas.

CUMPSTON: I didn't know them too well for some reason or other. They came in after I went to school. I was in high school, I guess when they came.

KANEMOTO: Now we have some pictures of you at the depot.

CUMPSTON: That's at the store across from the depot.

KANEMOTO: Percy has made the comment that you were one of the three people, Caucasian families that were there to. . . (unpopular act to mingle with Japanese.)

P NAKASHIMA: Very few of them.

KANEMOTO: Very few there to send off the Japanese people.

CUMPSTON: Sarah Riley. And she taught school. She was the teacher at one time in the little school above Sheldon. And I don't know whether there were Japanese in the school or not. There was everything else there. They were

mixed. But it would have to be, if the Japanese were working on the river ranches. And I wouldn't have known them too well.

KANEMOTO: Can you remember anybody else that was there, being that...

A NAKASHIMA: Bob Saini was there. Do you remember Bob? You don't know him, huh?

CUMPSTON: I certainly do. He was Conrad's cousin.

A NAKASHIMA: Where is he?

CUMPSTON: He's still on that place where his grandfather lived.

A NAKASHIMA: Oh really? We'd lost all track of him.

CUMPSTON: He writes in the paper quite frequently, telling everybody how to take care of themselves.

P NAKASHIMA: He's changed.

A NAKASHIMA: He's a bachelor. We had a little problem with him so we. . . . And then George Carlisle was there to see us off. There were three Caucasian friends that were there to see us off. I was new in Elk Grove then. I was married about 2 years.

CUMPSTON: I was so busy taking pictures that day.

A NAKASHIMA: You didn't take mine, huh?

CUMPSTON: I don't know whether you were in these others.

Did you look in Mary's book?

A NAKASHIMA: Mary who?

KANEMOTO: Tsukamoto.

A NAKASHIMA: No, I've never been to her place, so I wouldn't know.

CUMPSTON: No, it would be in the book that she printed.

The pictures in her book are my pictures.

P NAKASHIMA: Mary Tsukamoto? No, I didn't look at it. We were invited but we didn't make it.

A NAKASHIMA: We had something to do that night. There were only about, I would say three or four Caucasian friends, that saw us off at the depot. And that was it. That's why we remember you.

CUMPSTON: I think she's the only one I ever had words with about the service.

A NAKASHIMA: Oh, did you?

CUMPSTON: Well, when she fought so hard for this 20,000, you know. At first I was really quite angry. And we were good friends. She had asked me over for something, and I was over visiting. She brought the subject up, and I said, "No, I'm not in favor of it." And she said, "You're not." And I said, "No, I'm not."

And she said, "Why?" And I said, "If you get 20,000, then I want 20,000." I lived alone for four years. And while you didn't have it maybe as living quarters and all, but you worked just as hard as I worked to make ends meet. 'Cuz I wasn't working, and Bill was."

KANEMOTO: He was serving. . . He was in the army?

CUMPSTON: Yes. Like I say, he volunteered. He and Leonard [Hastie] and Al [Halverson]. Three boys from here went together. And Bill and Leonard stayed together, and Al was transferred to some other unit.

KANEMOTO: So now that it has become an actuality, what do you think about it? The redress, the so-called, the \$20,000.

CUMPSTON: I haven't even thought about it anymore. I had my say, and that was the end of it. I'm not one to cause problems. They weren't treated fair. But at the same time, I had to remember World War I when these people who did not, they'd take them out and shoot them. Actually. That's not funny. That is the truth. They did when the Filipinos came in, they'd find them hanging from trees

CUMPSTON: over in the Wilton area. I'd gone through this kind of stuff before. And what I tried to say to Mary, had you not gone, had you. Because she said if our children who are after us now to do this, and to make amends. I said, "Well, that's fine, but don't you realize, and haven't you ever said to your children, think what would have happened to some of you people, not all of you, but some of you would have died. You would have died. And it would have been even more bitter had we all known where the Japanese did strike. They struck all up and down the coast. We never knew that until Bill and I took a trip, all the way from south way up, and every once in a while there was a place where they left some shells. You never read that in the papers. You know. And so that, you know, there's bound to be mixed feelings. But I'm, I'm not a bitter person. They've won it, and I think that's great. Especially for the older ones. The younger ones they don't need it. But the older ones do. Dick [Ledwith] knew quite of bit about so many of these people. He had. . . . I was trying

to think what else he had to say. But, that's all, he had kept track of Tom until he died.

In fact he saw Tom just a few days before he died.

A NAKASHIMA: Tom who?

CUMPSTON: Tom Tanabe.

A NAKASHIMA: Did he see him?

CUMPSTON: Yes. He kept in touch with him. Dick Ledwith. He lived in Sacramento. And he was a Sheldon boy. He was Irish.

KANEMOTO: He lived in Sheldon.

CUMPSTON: He lived in Sheldon. And so he also knew all of these children that I knew. But he stayed through high school, and after that he worked for. . . What was that food store in Sacramento? Arata Brothers. They took crops in. If you had walnuts to sell.

P NAKASHIMA: What ever happened to. . .?

CUMPSTON: Nellie? She came to one of our class reunions not too many years ago. And Nellie looked just like she did when she left Elk Grove.

KANEMOTO: Nellie is who now?

P NAKASHIMA: Tanabe.

CUMPSTON: Nellie Tanabe. I don't know if she ever married or not, but she came as Nellie

Tanabe. My class of '31 originated the reunions. We used to meet quite often, unlike most classes. We met often. Now we have included. . . . We have people coming from 1900 to 1945. And now we have Japanese coming from Japan. And coming home to the meeting. And what we feel bad about it is, they come that far, and people that live in Elk Grove won't come. And that's sad. Because they come to see those people.

A NAKASHIMA: He always gets his invitation, but of course, he didn't graduate from Elk Grove. That's why he never goes to the reunions.

KANEMOTO: Now, that's right he went to Oakland High School.

CUMPSTON: Now, Dorothy Ito said if you'd like to talk to her one day, if you could catch her home, that she would be happy to talk to you, too. She comes to here now. She has shrunk, like I have.

A NAKASHIMA: She's never been that big.

CUMPSTON: Oh, she says she wasn't, but I remember Mary as being shorter. Not Dorothy.

A NAKASHIMA: They're both about the same size.

CUMPSTON: See, I never was very big, but she always seemed bigger to me, for some reason or other.

A NAKASHIMA: This is the list that Mary has, you know.

KANEMOTO: I don't have the Ito name.

A NAKASHIMA: This is why I want Marion to get it.

CUMPSTON: I have her phone number here, too, and her address. And that was Frank and George Yamada. Now I heard that Frank just died recently, and he managed a baseball team in Japan.

He was quite famous for a while. Elk Grove and Sheldon, not just Japanese, but the. . .

. . All of my friends all came out of churches. The children that won, came out of the churches. The Japanese, and the Methodists. You can go down and these kids that won all these oratorical contests and all, you'd find Methodists. Some of these Japanese people they were all, you were all Buddhists at that time.

KANEMOTO: So you were here when all the Japanese were evacuated. I'm sure you had mixed feelings. How did you perceive the overall. . .

CUMPSTON: It wasn't these people's fault. They weren't over there. They didn't have anything to say about it. In fact, the people in Japan

didn't have anything to say about it, when you come down to it. Just like Iraq today.

People really didn't have anything to say about it.

KANEMOTO: Okay, so a few years passed, and did you keep in touch with anybody in camp at all?

CUMPSTON: No, I didn't at the time, I was so busy myself, and you were not encouraged to. I don't think we knew where everybody was. At least not for some time.

KANEMOTO: Because certainly we didn't know where we were being sent.

CUMPSTON: Because some were eventually sent into Arizona. I was trying to think. . . Where did Hugh and Ruth [Kiino] go? They went back East. Wasn't that during the war? Didn't they go back to Michigan.

A NAKASHIMA: Yes, they went to Michigan, I think.

CUMPSTON: Bud and Betty went and bought a car back there one year and they went to see her, and Hugh said, afterwards, he said, "It was so funny." He said, "I looked out the front window of my restaurant, and said, 'Gee, that looks like Bud Jones getting out of that car.' And Bud went around to open the door for Betty,

and here Betty came (whisper) 'Why it is Bud and Betty' and he closed the restaurant and took them home.

A NAKASHIMA: Why, is that so.

CUMPSTON: I think most of us maybe are not as close as we should be, but we've always been with these two. So we're always funny on these. We had our fiftieth wedding anniversary. Aileen called me the next day and said, "Do you know we were the only Japanese there." And I said, "Who are the Japanese?" You know, you're our friends. Japanese business, shame on you.

KANEMOTO: You don't see them as Japanese. I see.

CUMPSTON: No, no. The others I just haven't stayed close to like we have with Percy. And I guess that was because Aileen and I get along so well, we have more or less. . . . Percy and Bill were close friends. Like I say, Bill would be sick and Percy would be there.

KANEMOTO: Now let's talk about Bill. Bill passed away just two years ago?

CUMPSTON: Two years ago.

KANEMOTO: Two years ago. You visited him quite often when he'd be convalescing at home?

CUMPSTON: No, he died suddenly. He got sick in the night and five hours later he was gone. He had heart surgery fourteen years before that.

KANEMOTO: He did enjoy some retirement. This is when Percy came to visit Bill.

CUMPSTON: No, he came to visit Bill when they were in high school. Bill liked to visit him, after that. And then Bill would stop by once in a while to see if he were still alive.

A NAKASHIMA: You didn't tell her what kind of business he was in.

CUMPSTON: Oh, my husband was a well driller and a pump installation man.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. So you must have known Mr. Larson then. Don Larson's father? He was also in the pump business.

CUMPSTON: They were people who came in on us. Our business goes back to, probably 1920.

KANEMOTO: Hmm that is old. Okay.

P NAKASHIMA: There is one big family. Bakers, Cumpston.

KANEMOTO: So you were related to Jessie Baker who is well known for an Elk Grove School for Special Education.

CUMPSTON: Sister-in-law.

P NAKASHIMA: Bill's sister.

KANEMOTO: Bill's sister, I see.

CUMPSTON: There were ten years between them. She just died.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

A NAKASHIMA: Betty still lives down here doesn't she?

KANEMOTO: Betty who? Last name?

P NAKASHIMA: Sugimoto. . . Miyata.

CUMPSTON: And her brother's name was Hagino?

P NAKASHIMA: Hajime. H-a-j-i-m-e. Hajime.

A NAKASHIMA: We used to call him 'Hoarder'. (Laughter)

CUMPSTON: Shame on you.

A NAKASHIMA: Well, that's what they called him. A nickname.

KANEMOTO: So I think some of them returned, what three and one half, four years later. They started coming back. Can you recall some of the communities' feelings when the Japanese Americans started coming back?

CUMPSTON: They didn't come back into Sheldon. That land was not theirs. That was at the time when the Japanese could not own their own property. It wasn't until their children. . . And of course, by the time they left

and back they bought other places. And a lot of them I've lost track of. Oh, and Betty Yamada, Yamamoto, I guess. She's the one that married Jack Takahashi.

P NAKASHIMA: No, she married someone else. Jack married Dorothy.

CUMPSTON: Did he marry Dorothy? Dorothy who?

P NAKASHIMA: Yamamoto.

CUMPSTON: Two sisters. I thought it was Betty that he married. Because I know it didn't last very long.

A NAKASHIMA: And then she's married to Sumida in Sacramento. George Sumida. Yamagami. Betty's married Yamagami. They were in Manzanar together.

CUMPSTON: You see, none of them came back to Sheldon. Now, I can't remember any that came back really to Elk Grove. Because you see most of our high school goes clear to Fruitridge Road. Elk Grove District.

KANEMOTO: So that included the Florin area. So I know many of the Florin families refer to the Elk Grove preschool.

CUMPSTON: And as they went through school and went to college, I guess they branched out into other

things other than agriculture. And I think a lot of them, didn't they head down toward Courtland and down through there? It seems to me some of them went there. Of course, those were mostly Chinese down there.

P NAKASHIMA: Not too many there.

A NAKASHIMA: Well there is that big family.

P NAKASHIMA: Kamatani. They're big farmers.

A NAKASHIMA: Farm in Courtland, don't they?

P NAKASHIMA: They still have a main house there outside of Courtland.

CUMPSTON: One more I stayed close to was Sam.

A NAKASHIMA: Tsukamoto?.

KANEMOTO: Was that Al's relative?

P NAKASHIMA: No, no relation.

CUMPSTON: Aren't they cousins?

P NAKASHIMA: No relation.

CUMPSTON: Well, they weren't alike. Al was always quiet. And Sam was always in the middle of everything.

A NAKAJIMA: Big-hearted guy.

CUMPSTON: And I never got to know his wife too well. She was always so quiet.

A NAKAJIMA: She had a rough old road to hoe. She had to take care of all the in-laws and out-laws,

and all that sort of thing. She sold the place.

And she bought a home right here by the new shopping center, right back here. She doesn't live too far from the Tsukamoto's. Al's.

CUMPSTON: Did Al move, too?

A NAKASHIMA: Yes, he just bought a new home here.

P NAKASHIMA: What a place.

KANEMOTO: In a new development.

CUMPSTON: Which new development?

KANEMOTO: Camden.

A NAKASHIMA: Yes, that's where she bought a home. Camden.

Oh, maybe a couple of months that she bought a home.

CUMPSTON: We've decided here we're not going to buy another house. If we want this, we'll move into a couple of trailer homes.

P NAKASHIMA: That's what I decided.

CUMPSTON: You won't have any yard. . . . How could you do that though, Percy? You have to have your garden.

P NAKASHIMA: I got a basic half an acre, and I've got plenty of room for a garden.

CUMPSTON: But your house is on it. You haven't moved.

P NAKASHIMA: No.

CUMPSTON: Well, it's like here. We've got a half acre, too.

KANEMOTO: But what will they give you for a half acre? It seems like you've got a prime. . .

CUMPSTON: Everything around me has gone for. . .

P NAKASHIMA: She's the only one that's holding out.

CUMPSTON: I'm not holding out. Nobody's ever come near me. It's the people here that say, "Fran, go get a real estate man." And I thought, "Well, I'm a business lady and if they want it, they'll pay my price. I've got a lawyer who takes care of things for me.

P NAKASHIMA: One of these days, they'll get it for you. A price that you can't turn down.

CUMPSTON: That would be all right. Because I just got word today that I can't turn my dog loose on a half acre any more. I've gotta bring her home and keep her leashed up. Poor little dog. She's not as old as I am.

KANEMOTO: In some ways then, it was a blessing in disguise that the Japanese did not come back, because they lost everything and it would have been very difficult.

[Discussion deleted]*

P NAKASHIMA: A lot of times I wish that certain people were still living. And you could interview them. People that would go through it. I bet they've passed away.

CUMPSTON: Remember it. What else do you want to do.

P NAKASHIMA: I remember it.

CUMPSTON: I haven't cried for Bill since he's been gone. I couldn't. It was too good. I have nothing to cry about. I miss him. I might shed a few tears when I look at his old empty bed. I got stuff piled on his bed so it's not empty. (Laughter) I've got a couple of dolls on there. I have clothes I'm going to wear. You know I don't let that bed stay empty.

P NAKASHIMA: He had a good life.

CUMPSTON: Oh, wonderful. I didn't think so for a while, but I grew up while Bill was gone. So the war did something good for me.

KANEMOTO: Hardship does kinda. . .

* Mrs. Cumpston deleted material during her review of the draft transcript.

CUMPSTON: I used to get angry, because they worked up at Knight's Landing alot. All this heavy steel buildings, and all the heavy irrigating work up there, that's all our work. For our company years ago. And Bill would be gone Monday morning and he'd come home Saturday night. And, of course, Saturday night I wanted to go out. He'd be gone all week. So that when he was in the service, and I had to go to work, come Saturday night, I wanted to stay in. So it was pretty easy when he got home. We got along a whole lot better. But I grew up.

KANEMOTO: Well, Percy do you have anything else to add? To this lady's contribution?

CUMPSTON: We're just glad we're just nice people, aren't we?

P NAKASHIMA: I'm glad I'm living.

CUMPSTON: Yes, I am, too.

P NAKASHIMA: I'm enjoying my retirement in my old age.

CUMPSTON: We have alot to be thankful for.

P NAKASHIMA: I've got a lot to be thankful for.

CUMPSTON: I'm like you folks. I stay close to my church.

P NAKASHIMA: We do, too.

CUMPSTON: I was on the cradle roll in this church. I'm the oldest member now. I've been there the longest. I'm not the oldest. Maybe not in membership, but I'm the oldest to be there. I don't work within the church. I will not be on any committees, I will not sign up for any special thing. [I worked with children and taught Sunday School.]

P NAKASHIMA: You're getting smart now.

CUMPSTON: I just do what I have time for, and what I can do. In the mean time, I visit at least 2 people I haven't seen. Two people a week that I go see. So, I've always got somebody in mind that I can go see. And I do this all the time. And I just started going to the party. Like I say.

A NAKASHIMA: Yes, I know. And you're going to start kicking up your heels now.

CUMPSTON: I sent a Christmas letter out with Sonny, my son. You met him. On with me up the Oregon coast. And I sent this letter back to some of Bill's relations. And they wrote back and said, "I'm so sorry about Bill. Is this your new husband?" Oh-h-h.

KANEMOTO: But you look great and very young for 77 years.

CUMPSTON: I feel good.

KANEMOTO: Aileen, do you have anything to add.

A NAKASHIMA: He's from around here. I don't know too much about things.

CUMPSTON: She just loves me and Percy.

A NAKASHIMA: That's it. Oh, I have a few things to say about the Japanese here.

CUMPSTON: You know the nice thing about trying to. . . I find that I always had a feeling like I was never quite what I should be. And I think everybody has it. But all of a sudden I decided how lucky we were and really how talented we were, and are. That we can live our life and enjoy it, and not worry, not be bitter, and all these kinds of things.

KANEMOTO: And I feel that this is America.

CUMPSTON: That's why.

KANEMOTO: If this is Japan, it's not that free.

CUMPSTON: No country is. No country is. You have to be very careful what you say.

KANEMOTO: We share the fact that we are in the United States.

CUMPSTON: That's what we stand for.

P NAKASHIMA: My daughter's in Japan, now. She wants us to visit her. I told her I don't want to go to Japan.

A NAKASHIMA: We went once before in 1968.

P NAKASHIMA: I tell her to come back and visit us.

CUMPSTON: My friend went. . . . She loved it. Remember. Oh, shoot I wish I could remember names. She was Al's wife, one of the boys that went with Bill. Halverson.

A NAKASHIMA: Bill Halverson? Oh, Al.

CUMPSTON: No, Al. Al and Bill went together.

P NAKASHIMA: Who was Halverson?

CUMPSTON: Well, he's dead now. He gave Bill a little gold coin to wear for good luck, when Bill was in the service. I still have that.

P NAKASHIMA: They were one of the. . . one of the better group. People that were good to Japanese, too.

CUMPSTON: Oh, they were good to everybody. In fact, I think the mother, didn't she just die recently? Not too long ago. She was in the rest home for many years.

A NAKASHIMA: Oh, Ishigaki, you don't remember them?

CUMPSTON: Who?

A NAKASHIMA: Ishigaki.

P NAKASHIMA: He stayed in Halverson's. They had a ranch on Elk Grove-Florin Road there. They raised strawberries there.

CUMPSTON: Oh, I'll be darned. See there's lots that I didn't meet. I was getting married then and I didn't have time.

A NAKASHIMA: You didn't have anything to do with. . .

(Laughter)

CUMPSTON: No, it wasn't that, I was busy. And after Bill came home, I kept working for a while. By that time I was being trained for a bookkeeper in General Motors. That's why I'm not getting a real estate man now.

[Bob Batey, Sr., sold a car to Lavina Altucker, age ninety.] She just wants to come up town. I found this old car that she can drive. It's easy. No problem, and she did.

KANEMOTO: Thank you very much Frances. We certainly appreciate...

CUMPSTON: Well I wish there was more that I could do.

[End Tape 1, Side B]